

3 July 2018		ITEM: 7
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Children's Social Care Development Plan 2018 - 19		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Sheila Murphy - Assistant Director Children's Social Care		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy - Assistant Director Children's Social Care		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson – Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This covering report provides a progress update to the revised Children's Social Care Development Plan 2018 – 19. A copy of the Development Plan is available online.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That Children's Overview and Scrutiny consider the progress and direction of travel for children's social care in completing the required actions from the Development Plan.**
- 1.2 That Children's Overview and Scrutiny receive assurance that the Development Plan will deliver the required improvements.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The new Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework started in January 2018.
- 2.2 ILACS has a greater reliance on the use of ongoing intelligence to decide where and when to inspect. Ofsted will have access to data from various sources including annual data returns and the new annual self-evaluation. Under ILACS, local authorities are required to share their self-evaluation at the annual engagement meeting with Ofsted. Thurrock had their annual engagement meeting on the 9 May 2018. Authorities will be subject to unannounced inspections.
- 2.3 The ILACS is seen as being within a 'system' of inspection and engagement

with Ofsted and not a one-off event such as a 4 week Single Inspection Framework (SIF) inspection. Each Local Authority will have an annual engagement meeting with Ofsted. A month before the engagement meeting the Local Authority will send Ofsted the annual self-evaluation of their services. Within a 3 year period a 'Requires Improvement' Local Authority will receive 2 focused inspections and a standard full inspection of 2 weeks duration. Ofsted is keen to have a continuing dialogue with Local Authorities, in order to 'catch them before they fall'.

- 2.4 In response to the ILACS the department has established a Children's Social Care Development Plan which incorporates the recommendations from the previous SIF, as well as including areas for improvement identified through our own self-evaluation.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Services to children, young people and families in Thurrock were judged to 'Require Improvement' by Ofsted in March 2016. The inspectors stated in their report that 'children and young people were found to be safe during this inspection, with none identified who were at immediate risk of significant harm without plans and services being in place to reduce these risks and to meet their needs'.

- 3.2 The Children's Development Plan builds on the work completed through the Ofsted Improvement Plan and is based on 8 priority action areas for the service. These are:

1. Recruiting, retaining and developing a skilled and confident social care workforce;
2. Providing coherent and coordinated early help services to children and their families;
3. Building consistent quality and timeliness of assessment; care planning and decision making for children in need and in need of protection;
4. Ensuring high quality support and services for looked after children and effective permanency planning. Ensuring timely purposeful post adoption support;
5. Putting the voice and day to day experience of the child at the center of social care practice;
6. All children missing from home or care must have access to a return interview. Analysis arising from risks faced by children missing from home or care and children missing from education, should inform action to reduce risk;
7. Supporting young people leaving care to have a positive and successful transition to adulthood and independence;
8. Embedding strong quality assurance and governance mechanisms to drive continual improvements in services.

- 3.3 Instability of the social care workforce has been a key priority for

improvement. The service was dependent on a high proportion of agency social workers, although it was acknowledged that a range of creative ideas had been implemented to improve recruitment; there has been a significant improvement made in this area, particularly in the recruitment of permanent Team Managers in the Children and Families Assessment Team (CFAT) and the Family Support Teams (FST). There has been an increase in the permanent recruitment of Social Workers in CFAT, FST and the Team for Disabled Children, who no longer has any agency staff members. At the time of the SIF inspection in March 2016 there were 60 agency social workers; at the end of May 2018 this number has been reduced to 39 agency workers.

- 3.4 The 2016 inspection found that the service for children looked after was not consistent and too many children became looked after on an emergency basis. A new service has been established to strengthen our approach to early intervention and prevention. Previous audits have suggested that the number of emergency admissions to our care has decreased. However this area of social work activity will continue to be monitored to ensure that progress continues to be made. Through more effective management of the service, the numbers of children in care and those on a child protection plan, have started to decrease during 2017/18 and are now more in line with our statistical neighbours. At the end of March 2017 there were 68 children per 10,000 of the child population subject to a child protection plan, whereas at March 2018 there were 54 per 10,000 subject to a child protection plan, in line with statistical neighbours average at 54.6. Looked after children were at 82 children per 10,000 at March 2017, that figure is 73.3 at March 2018 and statistical neighbours average are 68 per 10,000 of child population.
- 3.5 The 2016 Ofsted report said that more needed to be done to increase the number of in-house foster carers, as too many children and young people were placed out of the borough. Currently, more children are now placed with in-house foster carers than Independent Fostering Agencies, and there has been a clear shift in the balance of placements and increasing numbers of children are being placed in or near the borough. At March 2018, 87% of children in our care are placed within 20 miles of their home address, this compares favourably against the statistical neighbour average of 82% of children being placed within 20 miles of their home address.
- 3.6 The strategy is to increase the In-House foster placement capacity of 80 carers by 20% annually for the next 3 years. The intended outcome is that by 2020, Thurrock should be able to place up to 80% (230) of all children in care with In-House Foster Carers. To achieve this, a net increase of 45 new fostering household must be added to the current portfolio over the next 2.5 years. Our fostering recruitment target is a net increase of 60 approved carers by 2020. A net increase of 20 placements has already been achieved for 2017/18.
- 3.7 23 fostering assessments have been completed between 2017/18 which consists of 17 fostering households and 6 connected carers. 78.2% (18) were completed within the national timescale of 8 months from application to panel and approval. All new foster carers presented to panel within the last

three months were within national timescales which evidences an improvement in performance.

- 3.8 The Ofsted inspection of 2016 said that management oversight needed to be improved and regular supervision needed to be in place. The service has in place reporting mechanisms to monitor the regularity of supervision within required timescales (supervision to take place monthly), this information is scrutinised at the monthly performance meetings chaired by the Assistant Director, with all Service Managers in attendance. Current performance evidences compliance of supervision timescales at 85%. Remedial action is taken as required following these performance meetings. A programme of monthly audits is in place and the audit template has a section on management oversight and supervision for each case audited. Current performance indicates that more work needs to be undertaken to improve the quality of management oversight. Further work is being undertaken to clarify expected management standards and to drive performance to be consistently good. A Team Managers' monthly performance report has been in place since September 2017 and there is a section for the managers to report on monthly supervision requirements with opportunity to set out improvements in place within each team.
- 3.9 The Ofsted inspection 2016 stated that the organisation's use of management information and quality assurance was poor and this impedes improvement; Social Care managers have advised and supported the data team to provide a performance data digest which is regularly scrutinised by the Senior Management Team and the Corporate Director of Children's Services on a monthly basis to drive up performance. There is a Quality Assurance Framework for auditing cases and utilising the learning from these, with quality as its main focus. However, whilst there has been some investment to ensure that there is a full suite of data available to managers and that there is regular monthly audit activity taking place, there is still a need to embed this fully into practice.
- 3.10 Following series of workshops, social workers are responding positively to a culture of early permanency. Social workers involved with children subject to the Public Law Outline process are required to attend permanency planning meetings for advice and guidance. The tracking system introduced has made a real difference in early permanency, particularly for children suitable for adoption. Due to effective management oversight, robust adoption tracking and streamlined linking processes, the current adoption timeliness performance, over the 3 year average, is below England and Eastern Region average (which is good performance). 100% of looked after children adopted during 2017/18 were placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision for adoption and the average days between Placement Order and approval of match is 47.3. This is top quartile performance. This trend, if sustained, will make Thurrock one of the best performing authorities (for adoption timeliness) in England by 2020. However, more work needs to be done to increase the number of children

adopted from care.

- 3.11 Post Adoption and Special Guardianship support has been expanded to offer ongoing direct support to families to minimise crisis, disruptions, and breakdown. The offer is also extended to parents who require support to deal with the loss of children through adoption or special guardianship.
- 3.12 The Development Board continues to meet monthly to ensure that all of the recommendations and other areas for improvement have been implemented. The Board is chaired by the Corporate Director of Children's Services.
- 3.13 Effective progress continues to be made across all areas of the plan and additional input is being provided to address those areas that require this to remain on track. There are examples of some very good work and improvements in the service, recruitment and retention is providing for a more stable workforce with staff who are committed to Thurrock, which is positive. The biggest challenge is inconsistency in social work practice. We are investing in Signs of Safety training as our social work model which is being rolled out to all staff, this will focus on a strengths based approach to working with families that will drive up assessment quality and provide a consistent framework of intervention. We have been delivering monthly training practice workshops for the staff since February 2018 to drive up practice standards. There is still a strong focus on analysing and understanding our data in relation to missing children and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and we continue to utilise additional resources for these tasks to ensure that Return Home interviews and CSE risk assessments are completed in a timely way. There is a focus on permanency planning for children. Quality Assurance process continue to be strengthened.

4. Consultation

N/A

5. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

The completed development plan will allow the council to meet and improve upon its core statutory functions in the delivery of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Nilufa Begum**
Management Accountant

There are no financial implications

6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor Children's Safeguarding

There are no Legal implications

6.3 Diversity and Equality

Whilst there are no direct implications from this report, the work to implement the Development Plan will strengthen our ability to meet and improve the delivery of services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Development Manager

6.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

N/A

7. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Ofsted Single Framework Inspection Report dated 24.5.16

8. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Children's Social Care Development Plan (to be Tabled)

Report Author:

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